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Subjects: ALP National Conference, uranium sales to India, same-sex marriage, Kevin Rudd, Newspoll.

GLEN BATHOLOMEW: Well, after a lively debate Australia is set to sell uranium to India, with the weekend ALP National Conference giving the green light for the sales. The Conference also saw tensions over former leader Kevin Rudd revived, and it has Labor on track for a battle with religious leaders over a vote to back gay marriage. Well, the Trade Minister Craig Emerson was one of the parliamentary leaders caught up in the conference battles, and he's speaking this morning to Marius Benson.

MARIUS BENSON: Craig Emerson, are there still doubts about whether India will agree to safeguards that are required for uranium sales? Might we still not sell uranium to India?

CRAIG EMERSON: There's no doubt that India wants to use uranium for peaceful purposes. It's entered into agreements with other countries that confirm this, and will enter into an agreement with Australia to confirm the application of safeguards to ensure that uranium is used for peaceful purposes.

BENSON: And can you say how soon uranium sales will go ahead with India?

EMERSON: I can indicate that the negotiations with India will begin in the first part of next year. And when they are complete, and to the satisfaction of both parties, then uranium sales will be permitted to India, subject to those safeguards in conformity with the platform of the ALP.

BENSON: The Conference at the weekend changed Labor's platform in favour of gay marriage. There are criticisms of that this morning from some religious leaders. Are you concerned that Labor might face a war from the pulpit?

EMERSON: I fully respect, again, the position that the ALP reaches at its National Conferences. My own position is unchanged, and that is that marriage is a union between a man and a woman. But a conscience vote has been granted, and various people within the Labor Party will express different views on that if and when a decision is put in to the Parliament on this matter. But I find it extremely ironic that Mr Abbott today is saying that he's open to the idea of a conscience vote. I've had two debates in the last couple of weeks: one with Senator George Brandis suggesting that the ALP is all over the place by agreeing a conscience vote, and that the Coalition is united in support of the Marriage Act definition of marriage; and Greg Hunt criticising the ALP for not having a conscience vote. So, the party that now has to answer this question, given that the ALP has answered it, is the Liberal Party.

BENSON: Kevin Rudd made it clear that he was not happy at the Conference; he said the Conference “squibbed” reform; that powerbrokers had blocked a greater say from rank and file. Are you concerned about that?

EMERSON: I think what actually happened is that there wasn't agreement on the nature of the reforms. There were ideas. And it wasn't as if all of the different identities and groupings in the ALP combined to defeat ideas; it's just that there wasn't a consensus on those ideas.

BENSON: There are tensions over Kevin Rudd's position coming from that Conference. Everybody noted that Julia Gillard listed every Labor Prime Minister when she was speaking at the Conference, except for one: she left out Kevin Rudd. Is he entitled to feel snubbed?

EMERSON: I think that the Prime Minister's speech was a good speech, but, yes, it didn't mention Kevin Rudd. But look, frankly, I think that in the great historic sweep of things that is not of major importance at the Conference. What actually happened is that the PM has recognised Kevin's contribution before; she will recognise it again. But we got ourselves into pretty lively debates on a range of vexed issues in the ALP, in the right forum - and that is the National Conference.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, there's a new Newspoll out today. It's got the Coalition down a bit. It's got some good news for Julia Gillard - up just a tick. But Labor's primary vote still stuck at 31 per cent. What do you make of all of that?

EMERSON:

Well, again, I make of that this fact: that the average Australian doesn't get up on a Monday or a Tuesday morning and say 'what will I do now after I eat breakfast: I'll check the latest opinion polls?'. And, sure, there is a slight improvement for Labor in this poll. That's welcome, but I don't intend to break the habit of a lifetime and go through all the details: that something's up one point, something's down one point. The Australian people expect more of political parties. And they're going to get more and are getting more from the Labor Government, because we are committed to creating more jobs, more prosperity and sharing opportunity fairly.

BENSON:

Craig Emerson, thanks very much.

EMERSON:

Thanks Marius.